

OPENING STATEMENT

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**Hearing: *“NASA’s Science Mission Directorate:
Impacts of the Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Proposal”***

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Good morning. I want to welcome the witnesses to today’s hearing.

Today’s hearing is focused on two important components of NASA’s overall science enterprise - its space and Earth science programs. Those programs have generated many of the discoveries, imagery, and inspiration that have engaged the American public in the excitement and wonder of space exploration.

Moreover, NASA’s science programs have helped to nurture and develop successive generations of scientists and engineers through university-based research, participation in space science missions, and data analysis.

In addition, NASA’s science programs have long been marked by a high degree of productive international cooperation and collaboration. In other words, NASA’s science programs have amply demonstrated the wisdom of the nation’s investment in them.

In that regard, when the President announced his exploration initiative two years ago, we were promised a robust science program at NASA with a healthy annual funding rate and an impressive set of future missions. As we now know, that’s not what happened.

In the two years since the FY 2005 budget request was submitted, the Administration has cut more than \$4 billion from the funding plans for NASA’s space and Earth science programs.

In addition, while not the focus of today’s hearing, I would also point out that NASA’s life science and microgravity science research programs have been decimated over the last two years and funding for ISS research has been cut back to the point where it is unclear exactly what use NASA intends to make of the ISS.

Returning to NASA’s space and Earth science programs; let me take a moment to list some of the impacts of the proposed reductions. Namely, the FY 2007 budget request would cut funding for research and analysis—the funding that helps support university-based space and Earth science research - by \$350 to \$400 million over the next five years, including a 50 percent reduction in fundamental research in astrobiology.

The Explorer program would be cut, and researchers working on a competitively selected Small Explorer mission would have their mission cancelled for budgetary reasons without even a prior review. Funding for robotic exploration of the solar system would be cut significantly relative to what had been projected just two years ago.

NASA’s planet-finding program - which was featured prominently in the President’s exploration initiative - is in disarray as a result of this budget request. The SOFIA mission being developed jointly with Germany, while officially “under review”, is given no funding in the FY 2007 budget request. The Beyond Einstein initiative would be delayed indefinitely.

The GPM mission, one of the highest scientific priorities of the Earth Science research community, would be delayed two and a half years. I could go on, but I think you get the picture.

And as some of our witnesses will point out in their testimony, these proposed actions run directly counter to the spirit and intent of the President's own American Competitiveness Initiative.

In fairness, the NASA Administrator has said that he is not happy about the need to make cuts to the science programs, but he characterizes the cuts as just a temporary situation that will be corrected when the Shuttle is retired.

I'd like to believe that he is right. However, I'm afraid I can't share his confidence based on the facts at hand.

We've already seen that for the past two years this Administration has been unwilling to fund NASA at the levels that it said NASA would need. And over those same two years, NASA has shifted billions of dollars out of its space and Earth science programs.

I hope that the Associate Administrator can give me credible assurances that that won't happen again next year or the year after.

At the same time as the Shuttle program is ending in 2010, NASA's plans call for a major increase in the funding requirements for its exploration initiative to pay for the heavy lift launch vehicle, the lunar lander, and other exploration-related hardware programs.

It looks like any Shuttle dividend will be going to fund human exploration, not to cover science funding shortfalls. I hope I'm wrong, and I hope that Dr. Cleave will be able to shed some light on the plans for science funding beyond this budget request.

And despite the President's call for an integrated program of human and robotic exploration of the solar system, I am concerned that science has become an afterthought in the agency's exploration initiative - largely decoupled from the exploration initiative and vulnerable to being cut back as necessary to pay for the human exploration hardware.

That worries me, and I hope that Dr. Cleave will clarify the role that her office is playing in determining the scientific priorities that NASA will pursue in its exploration initiative. Maximizing the nation's scientific return should be a prime determinant of NASA's approach to human exploration, not an after-the-fact justification.

Well, we have a great deal to discuss today, and a distinguished set of witnesses to help us sort through some tough issues. I again want to welcome them, and I yield back the balance of my time.